

Does Your Guest Satisfaction and Mystery Shop Data Harmonize...or Just Make Noise? - By Rob Kaplan-Sherman
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Align Your Data Streams to Optimize the Guest Experience and Bottom Line

At least twice a month, I get a slightly desperate phone call from a hospitality executive in charge of 'guest experience,' hoping that LRA can clarify some of the muddy data streams that are guiding company decisions. To paraphrase:

'Building loyalty is really important. We work very hard to deliver an outstanding guest experience. We have set up multiple listening posts - both guest satisfaction survey and mystery shopping programs - to help us measure our guest experience. We constantly monitor our results at the property level and see little relationship between the two metrics. Which is correct? Send help please.'

Sound familiar? You are not alone.

Let me begin by assuring you that both mystery shopping and guest satisfaction surveys are valuable tools to help measure and shape your guest experience. When poorly designed, however, they can provide conflicting information, causing confusion instead of clarity.

So how do you make them sing in harmony? A good place to start is to ask yourself these questions:

Were the mystery shopping and survey forms created to evaluate the same aspects of the guest experience?

(Usually the answer ranges from 'not really' to 'the last guy did them.')

How were the point allocations (i.e., 'weights') on the mystery shopping form created?

('The same way we do everything around here - endless team meetings and an uneasy consensus!')

How did guest survey results figure into what should be measured during a 'shop' or in the weighted point allocations?

(Usually the answer is 'we based those on our gut' or 'they didn't.')

And therein lies the problem. It is very difficult for mystery shopping and survey programs to produce properly aligned results when they are built independently and the 'voice of the guest' does not influence the focus of the 'shop.'

Thus, the need to develop a research process that assigns weights to Quality Assurance/Mystery Shopping metrics based on guest needs, which, in turn, are related to key business measures (RevPAR, Occupancy Rates, Spend on Property, etc.). It is critical to align these data streams so that everyone is singing from the same hymnal in order to improve the guest experience...and positively impact the measures that drive your business.

Risk vs. Reward: So, what is the risk of operating with dissonant data? In at least one well-known organization, both programs were in danger of being eliminated because they were turning out conflicting results - the guest experience equivalent of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

And the rewards? Having data that sings, allowing you to accurately measure the guest experience, correctly diagnose deficiencies and drive change that positively impacts your guests and the bottom line.

How it Works: After a thorough review of your guest satisfaction data, you could conduct some exploratory qualitative research to uncover the key elements of an important touch point. Let's say, for example, that check-in is a crucial touch point and a successful check-in is marked by little or no wait time.

Once you have isolated those experiential elements and touch points, you would conduct additional quantitative analysis using 'trade-off' techniques to a.) identify the optimal configuration for the experience at that touch point, and b.) how relatively important it is to the guest. To build on the previous example, you might uncover that the wait should be two minutes at most...and that this accounts for 40-percent of the perceived quality of the guest experience at check-in.

Bingo. A descriptive set of standards and a properly configured and weighted mystery shopping evaluation not only mesh with guest survey data but help diagnose issues before they become problems.

Sometimes, the results produce a genuine eye-popping 'WOW,' in one instance, a client was able to improve the connection between survey and mystery shopping data by more than 500%, providing insight into connections that they previously thought were nonexistent, allowing them to act on the harmonious data streams more effectively.

If this issue has caused you sleepless nights or just provided interesting chatter around the office water cooler, please feel free to contact me to chat. Just think - we can skip the whole first phone call described above!

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